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House of Representatives

Frederick Douglass Trafficking Victims Prevention and Protection Reauthorization Act of 2017—HR 2200

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey... Mr. Speaker, I thank the distinguished chairman ED ROYCE for yielding. I thank him for his leadership on trafficking, for this bill in particular, for the markup, and for all of the assistance he provided. I also thank ELIOT ENGEL, our ranking member. I thank them from the bottom of my heart.

I want to thank KAREN BASS, the lead Democrat on the bill, for her exceptional leadership and her collaboration on this legislation.

I want to thank Speaker RYAN and Majority Leader MCCARTHY. I have to say—and I have been working on human trafficking since about 1995, chaired probably more than 30 hearings and written four laws—I have never seen such a deep commitment to fighting trafficking and protecting victims than our leadership. It is unparalleled and it is inspired.

KEVIN MCCARTHY helped ensure timely consideration. There are eight committees of referral. Sometimes that is a death knell for any bill. It is so hard to secure agreements and vote them out. Well, each of those chairmen and their staffs worked diligently and in good faith. At the end of the day, the leadership was there. They had our back on the legislation.

I want to thank Chairman ROYCE, again, for his extraordinary leadership as well.

Mr. Speaker, ever since the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 became law in 2000, combating human trafficking has been a major priority in the United States and, indeed, globally.

Over the last 17 years, police and civil society organizations—many of them faith based—have identified and rescued more than 250,000 victims worldwide. Some put that number at close to 300,000. Prosecution of traffickers in the U.S. has increased by more than 500 percent, but, frankly, our task is far from accomplished.

The International Labor Organization suggests that nearly 21 million people in the world today are enslaved, most of them women and children. That is unconscionable. Every human life is of infinite value. We have a duty to protect the weakest and most vulnerable from harm.

The Frederick Douglass Trafficking Victims Prevention and Protection Reauthorization Act of 2017 is comprehensive. It is bipartisan, and it is designed to strengthen, expand, and create new initiatives to protect victims, prosecute traffickers, and prevent this cruelty and exploitation from happening in the first place.

Title I of the bill focuses on combating trafficking in the United States. Title II focuses on the world. Title III authorizes appropriations

of more than half a billion dollars over 4 years, including reauthorization of the TVPA of 2000.

The legislation, Mr. Speaker, is named in honor of the incomparable Frederick Douglass on the eve of his 200th birthday. Born a slave in 1818, he escaped when he was 20 and heroically dedicated his entire life to abolishing slavery and, after emancipation, to ending the Jim Crow laws in order to achieve full equality for African-American citizens. A gifted orator, author, editor, statesman, and Republican, he died in 1895.

Human trafficking, Mr. Speaker, is modern-day slavery that needs a Herculean effort to eradicate.

Among its numerous provisions and one that is of special interest to the Frederick Douglass Family Initiative—and we worked very closely with them on this—it authorizes HHS grant money to “establish, expand, and support programs” to provide age appropriate information to students all across America to avoid becoming victims of sex and labor trafficking as well as to educate school staff to recognize and respond to signs of trafficking.

It adopts a number of best practices, like for example making sure that when government employees book rooms, that we utilize hotels where they have initiated efforts and sponsored training to eradicate child sex trafficking. We do the same thing with airlines. The flight attendants—Delta is a classic example—once trained, can spot trafficking in progress, inform the pilot, and when that plane lands or jet lands, ensure that if there is a situation, there is an arrest of the traffickers and a rescue of the woman or children who are being trafficked.

We will now try, to the best of our ability, to hold the airlines to account. There needs to be reporting. It is already the law that they should provide this training. Now we want to ensure that training actually happens.

Chairman ROYCE talked about the TIP

Report. Just a couple weeks ago, Secretary Tillerson announced the 2017 TIP Report. It is a voluminous and very accurate report about what is happening in 190 countries around the world, including the United States. Those countries that are designated Tier 3, egregious violator, are subject to sanctions.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to commend the Trump administration for finally holding China to account as a Tier 3 violator. A worst offender.

The pending bill makes a number of important reforms to the TIP Report and how it is prepared. My hope is that we will have an even better, more accurate, and more effective effort at holding countries to account.

Again, this legislation applies to the United States for labor and sex trafficking as well as to the world. Again, I do want to thank all those who have been involved in it.

Let me just say we worked on this bill for well over a year with ATEST; Polaris; IJM; World Vision; United; Humanity; ECPAT; United States Conference of Catholic Bishops; Shared Hope International; CATW; Ambassador Swanee Hunt; the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, which provided valuable insight; and others. They were all very much a part of our effort.

I also want to thank critical staff, including Luke Murray and Kelly Dixon, from the Majority Leader's Office, who are outstanding—they get the job done, and they ask all the right questions about substance and process and helped us along—Doug Anderson, counsel of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs; Mary Noonan; my chief of staff, Piero Tozzi; Allison Hollabaugh; Krystal Williams, KAREN BASS' staff member; and so many others on the committees that also made such a huge difference in enabling us to get this through all the committees to the floor today.

I urge my colleagues to pass the bill.